

## **SKILL ACCUMULATION OF SRI LANKAN TEMPORARY MIGRANT PROFESSIONALS IN THE GULF REGION: A CASE STUDY OF QATAR**

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Since the boom in the oil industry in the mid-1970s, the Gulf region has increasingly become an attractive destination for Sri Lankan professional migrants. In the Gulf, Sri Lankan professionals get the opportunity to enhance various skills that are beneficial for Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, a significant proportion of these professionals do not return to Sri Lanka upon completion of their initial employment contracts, which prevents the country from capitalising on the skills and knowledge they obtain in the Gulf. The objectives of this case study on Sri Lankan professional migrants to Qatar is to identify the nature of skills these professionals gain in their host Gulf country, the usefulness of these skills for Sri Lanka and how they could be attracted to return to serve the needs of the country. The study is based on primary data gathered via in-depth interviews with 12 key informants as well as an online survey of 125 professionals representing three professions (engineering, quantity surveying and accounting). The sample for the online questionnaire was selected using a combination of non-probability methods of convenient, snowball and judgment sampling and the data gathered was analysed using a mixed methodology. This study identified that the primary skill gained by Sri Lankan professionals working in Qatar is communication skills followed by industrial exposure, technical skills and personality development. The study also found that the majority of Sri Lankan professionals in Qatar believe that Sri Lanka will benefit from the skills they accumulate in Qatar if they return to Sri Lanka. They believe that their exposure to cutting-edge technologies, and the confidence, efficiency and commitment that they develop by working in mega-scale projects in Qatar would be valuable for Sri Lanka. However, the study found that the majority of Sri Lankan professionals in Qatar have extended their stay in that country beyond their initial plans. Moreover, a significant number of these professionals intend to migrate to the OECD countries like Australia, Canada, etc. permanently without returning to Sri Lanka. These factors prevent Sri Lanka from capitalising on the skills they gained in Qatar. Therefore, it is important to implement policies to encourage such professionals to return to Sri Lanka. These policies should be designed in a way that makes maximum use of the overseas experience of the professionals for the development of Sri Lanka.

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